(a) whether the Planning Commission has asked the Department of Telecommunications to prepare a comprehensive paper on funds required for the expansion of telephone system in rural India and to present it before the Finance Ministry;

(b) if so, whether Department has already submitted the report to the Finance Ministry;

(c) if so, what is their reaction;

(d) by when funds would be allotted so that the implementation of the programme could start;

(e) whether the Planning Commission has set the target for providing telephones facilities to the rural India; and

(f) if so, the details of the target set?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d) Do not arise in view of (b) above.

(e) and (f) Planning Commission has approved the BSNL's (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) Annual plan target for the provision of 8.61 lakh DELs in the rural area during the year 2003-2004.

Decline in rice stock

†1218. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that rice stock with Government which was 234 lakh tonnes' in June, 2002 has declined to barely 132 lakh tonnes this year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) what fresh measures have been taken by Government to keep safe stock of rice in the Country atleast at 100 lakh tonnes and to prevent farmers of Orissa from selling their rice every year at throwaway price?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The decline has been due to increase in offtake and reduction in procurement.

(c) The Government has adequate stock of rice in the Central pool which is above the minimum buffer norms and is enough to meet the requirement under Public Distribution System (PDS) and Welfare Schemes. In order to reduce hardship of farmers and to avoid distress sale of paddy and the specifications of paddy have been relaxed in Orissa during Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2002-2003.

Downward revision of foodgrains

1219. SHRI G.K. VASAN: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

. (a) whether there has been a downward revision of foodgrains production estimates;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps taken to meet consumption demand in case of a shortfall in production?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) and (b) As per the Fourth Advance Estimates released on 1st July, 2003 the total foodgrains production for 2002-03 has been placed at 182.57 million tonnes as compared to 184.06 million tonnes according to the Third Advance Estimates released on 4th April, 2003. As several States were affected by severe drought which adversely affected agricultural production, revisions were found necessary in the figures used in the compilation of Third Advance Estimates.

(c) As the stock of foodgrains comprising both rice and wheat have been well above the buffer norm, the shortfall in production has not affected the supply position *vis-a-vis* demand.